

# INTRODUCING LOCAL RESOLUTIONS OF WELCOME IN YOUR COMMUNITY

Towns, cities and counties across the United States have already begun to come out with resolutions and statements of welcome, counteracting messages of fear and hatred which misrepresent the majority of communities in America. In mid-July the San Francisco Board of Supervisors and Santa Clara County each released resolutions and statements calling for a humanitarian response to increasing numbers of children and families fleeing Central America and arriving in the United States. Los Angeles and Columbia, South Carolina have followed suit. The Mayors of Lansing, Michigan, Syracuse, New York, and Atlanta Georgia have each championed statements of welcome after having heard from grassroots and faith-based groups in their cities.

## How Can You Get Your Town, City, County to Pass Similar Resolutions?

In most towns, cities and localities throughout the United States, you can ask your city council, county commissioners, village board, or other governing body to pass a resolution. Here are some thoughts on how to prepare for such an action:

- 1) Prepare the resolution you want passed (see examples below).
- 2) Map out the members of the council or board, identify likely allies and ask to meet with them or use a public comment period to introduce the idea to the entire council.
- 3) Explain how the issue is not only of national concern, but also a local issue, and why a resolution of welcome and support for Central Americans fleeing violence is important to your community.
- 4) Show the elected official(s) the resolution you have prepared, and ask for their support. If they are supportive, ask whether they are willing to introduce the resolution, and also ask for their advice about the rest of the Council (they may be able to help you find other supporters and provide you with other valuable insights).
- 5) Collect signatures from local residents, members of your faith-community in support of the resolution, or ask them to send postcards, letters and emails to their elected officials.
- 6) Encourage your church or organization to make a public statement in support of the children and/or its commitment to delegating resources to help. Share these statements with council members.
- 7) When the day for the vote arrives, pack the meeting room with your supporters to put pressure on the officials to adopt the resolution. It can be helpful to have "credible" figures, such as faith leaders, lawyers, professors, or other refugees who have been resettled to your area present to speak in support.

### Example: Santa Clara County Resolution in Support of Children and Families Fleeing Violence

“Small children and refugees fleeing violence in their home countries require our support, not our acrimony. Where other communities may turn these needy children away, our community is ready and willing to be compassionate.

“We urge communities in the Bay Area, throughout the State of California, and across the nation to join us to make good on America’s promise of fairness and due process.

“Under law, as a part of their deportation proceedings, every unaccompanied child is entitled to an evaluation to ascertain whether they are victims of human trafficking, have been abandoned or are eligible for asylum because of persecution. If not eligible, they will be returned home. But until this examination is complete, these children will remain in America where they must be treated humanely.”

### Example: Columbia, South Carolina City Council Passes a Resolution in Support of Refugee Children, Immigration Reform

A RESOLUTION TO RESTATE THE FOUNDING PRINCIPLES OF COLUMBIA, SOUTH CAROLINA, TO WELCOME UNACCOMPANIED IMMIGRANT AND REFUGEE CHILDREN AND TO SUPPORT COMPREHENSIVE IMMIGRATION REFORM

WHEREAS, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) reports that 350 children detained by immigration authorities were released to sponsors, typically relatives, in the State of South Carolina between January 1, 2014 and July 7, 2014 to be cared for while their immigration case is processed; and

WHEREAS, these 350 refugee children, who had no parent or guardian available to care for them when they were taken into custody, represent less than 1.2% of the 30,340 displaced children released to sponsor families across the nation; and

WHEREAS, displaced refugee children, like those placed in sponsor families in South Carolina, are often the most vulnerable among us having come to the United States fleeing violence, abuse or persecution in their home countries, as victims of human trafficking or simply seeking the opportunity to work hard and build a better life for themselves and their families; and

WHEREAS, the City of Columbia was founded in the spirit echoed in the words of Senator John Lewis Gervais who hoped "the oppressed of every land might find a refuge under the wings of Columbia"; and

WHEREAS, the City of Columbia believes that we have a duty to protect our children and provide for them and that to turn away a child in need, regardless of where he or she was born, is a violation not only of that spirit but of the fundamental principles of community and brotherhood upon which our city's foundations were built; and

WHEREAS, the City of Columbia further recognizes that the current influx of child refugees here and across the nation is only a symptom of a larger problem and that the only way to truly address the growing humanitarian crisis at our nation's southern border is to enact a comprehensive immigration reform plan that secures our borders, grows our economy and gives undocumented youth and their families the chance to earn their citizenship; NOW, THEREFORE,

BE IT RESOLVED by the Mayor and City Council of the City of Columbia, South Carolina on this 5th day of August, 2014 that we welcome every refugee child and unaccompanied immigrant child released to sponsors within our community by the Office of Refugee Resettlement and call on local, state and federal leaders to work together to address the current child refugee crisis by immediately adopting comprehensive immigration reform.

#### **Example: Local Activists Urge Passage of a Resolution of Welcome in Lansing, Michigan**

**Lansing, Mich. (WILX)** A local activist group used public comment Monday night to present the Lansing City Council with a resolution that would open the city's doors to immigrant children seeking asylum.

Action of Greater Lansing drafted a resolution and brought it to council members, asking them to adopt it. While the resolution may not be adopted in its current form, it's clear that a number of council members are in favor of the idea.

"I think I speak for the council when I say we are looking forward to if these children are placed in our community, embracing them and providing the support and the network for them to be nurtured and to thrive," said council vice president Judi Brown Clarke.

Fourth ward council member Jessica Yorke agreed that the council should send a message that Lansing is a welcoming community. "Many of us come from immigrant families from people that fled their country for one reason or another for a better future in the United States," she said. "I think stating our value as a welcoming city is an important thing for us to do."

Council President A'lynn Boles also seemed to signal her support for the idea Monday, though she scolded Action for taking its resolution to the media first, instead of bringing it to individual council members.